Fin Cop was investigated using a variety of methods including archive and desk-based research, geophysical survey (top right), earthwork survey (right) and excavation (bottom right), so that a rounded understanding of the site could be achieved.

Most of the work on site was undertaken by local volunteers. As well as the members of Longstone Local History Group and volunteers from the local community, all the schoolchildren from Longstone Primary School came on site to dig, along with older schoolchildren, students, and members of the Young Archaeologists Club. A DVD of the dig was filmed by the Great Longstone Church Youth Choir and the Cornerstones Youth Group and some of this can be viewed on the following website: www.greatlongstone.net.

Supported by

The hillfort is a Scheduled Ancient Monument on private land and should not be visited without permission.
The steep-sided hilltop overlooking Monsal Dale is known as 'Fin Cop', a name that broadly means 'Head of the Heap' in Old English, denoting its status as a high point in the landscape not only physically (325m) but also possibly in its importance. The hill also has longstanding mythical associations. Among other folk legends, Fin Cop was the home of the giant Hulac (also called Hector) Warren whose love for Hedessa, a young shepherdess, led to both their deaths.

The earthworks visible today on the summit of Fin Cop are the remains of an Iron Age hillfort. Dating of human remains found in the ditch show that the fort fell out of use around 300 BC.

Long before the Iron Age, Bronze Age farmers living in the area around 2000 BC chose the highest point of the hill for burying their dead. Rock-cut graves with stones piled over them were raised along the crest of the hill. When these graves were excavated in the 18th and 19th centuries, adult human skeletons were discovered accompanied by pottery vessels that may have contained food and drink for the afterlife.

During the recent excavations undertaken by Longstone Local History Group a truly unexpected discovery was made. Activity on the hilltop dating back to the time of the early hunter-gatherer groups who settled in the area after the last Ice Age was found. A series of test pits excavated across the interior of the fort produced over 1700 chipped stone artefacts made from chert.

Chert is a locally occurring rock that is found within the limestone bedrock and is chemically identical to flint. Although not as smooth as flint it can be chipped into a wide range of tools. Large quantities of chipping waste were found in the test pits indicating that Mesolithic hunters were quarrying and chipping chert on the hilltop between about 10,000 and 4,000 BC.
The main focus of the excavations was a trench over the southern rampart of the hillfort. The purpose of this trench was to determine the form of the defences as they would have originally stood and also to find dating evidence to tell us the age of the monument. In the photograph above, the rock-cut ditch can be seen, along with a causeway showing where a possible earlier entrance had been blocked up.

Within the ditch fill there was an unexpected find of human skeletal remains (left) which appear to have been unceremoniously thrown into the ditch as the hillfort rampart was pushed in. The remains are that of a woman accompanied by an infant and have been radiocarbon dated to around 300 BC, which provides the date at which the use of the fort came to an end.

One of the test pits also uncovered an assemblage of prehistoric pottery, and when this test pit was opened out into a larger trench over 200 pieces of pottery were recovered. The charred residues on these pots have been radiocarbon dated to around 750 BC in the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age.